

10 Things You Must Know Before Choosing Your Copier Vendor

Before making your final choice when choosing a copier vendor there are 10 things that you must know.

1) Are they an authorized dealer?

Ask if they are an authorized dealer for the brand copier they are recommending to your business. Besides hearing the answer, you will need some type of proof. A certificate from the manufacturer or being listed on the manufacturer's web site are adequate proof. An authorized dealer has the advantage of having the full support of the manufacturer which includes product training, replacement parts and supplies as well as warranty support (i.e. replacing defective machines).

2) Guarantees?

The second item you need to know is their guarantees. Most vendors have good intentions to provide good service. You need to find out what the vendor guarantees, in writing, to provide when things don't go smoothly. You are exchanging cash for the ability to produce documents. You need the assurance that you can produce those documents no matter what. Find out how the vendor guarantees to respond to service requests and what happens if there are repetitive problems with your equipment. A key point is not just finding out what the vendor intends to do, you also need to get an answer to the question "or what?". For example, you need to find out what the vendor's service response time is and then find out what the consequence is to the vendor if they don't perform.

3) Hidden fees?

Next find out what hidden fees exist besides the cost of acquiring the copier and its operating costs (service and supplies). Hidden fees can include filing fees, insurance charges or interim rent paid to a leasing company and delivery charges for supplies. Hidden fees can add significant expense to your total cost of ownership.

4) Who is the leasing company?

Most companies tend to lease when they acquire new copiers. You will want to find out who "funds" the vendor's leases. You need to understand the relationship between the equipment vendor and the leasing company. The closer the business relationship, the more likely it is that the vendor can help with issues that may arise with the equipment lease. Late fees, insurance charges, billing errors can be annoying and time consuming problems that can be tough to correct on your own. You want to know up-front what leverage the equipment vendor has to be able to help you.

5) Who is the vendor owner?

The fifth thing you need to know is who owns the vendor. Is the vendor locally owned or is it a division of an international company? Depending on the

structure of your business, each type of vendor can have an advantage to your business. For instance, if you are a local business and operate primarily in a single location, a local vendor may be the best choice. Although not a rule, local vendors (or dealerships) many times outshine national distributors in their ability to customize aspects of their support. On the other hand, if you operate in multiple locations, it may be easier for you to work with a vendor that can personally control the quality of service delivery for all your locations.

6) Supply replenishment?

A sixth item to determine is how the vendor replenishes supplies used by the equipment. Toner is the most frequently replaced component and without it, your equipment will not produce the documents your company needs to operate. You'll want to find out if the vendor has systems in place to keep you stocked at all times with the supplies necessary to operate your equipment. It's recommended to have your own backup plan but you are first asking the vendor about their systems that will prevent disaster on your end. You also want to ask about a worst case scenario when you do run out of toner. What systems do they have in place to get you back up and running again quickly?

7) Meter readings?

Although not critical to your equipment operating, a seventh item you want to find out about is how the vendor collects usage information or meter readings. Most vendors charge for service on a usage basis usually stated as a cost per copy. Service can be packaged in different ways but the vendor will always want to track your usage. Find out how meter readings are collected by the vendor. Your best case is where the vendors have an automated system where the equipment communicates directly with them (and doesn't violate any of your network security policies) so as to not disturb your employees.

8) Billing errors?

The eighth item to evaluate is who can help you with billing errors. Most often there are two entities you are dealing with. The first is the equipment vendor who is placing and supporting your copier equipment. You will receive operating cost service and included supplies) and supply (i.e. staples, paper) invoices from them. The second entity is the leasing company the vendor used to fund the copier lease. They will send lease invoices for the equipment. There are variations where the leasing company will invoice for the equipment as well as operating costs. Whatever your program type, you want to find out how many invoices you will receive and who is invoicing each component. Will you have one local point of contact that is close to the invoicing process or are there multiple contacts located far from your location. The fewer contacts you have to work with and the closer they are to the process, the faster and easier you will be able to resolve billing errors.

9) The "lemon".

In the 23 years that I was an equipment salesperson as well as a dealer principal, I never saw any equipment labeled as a “lemon” when it was delivered to our dock. Although not a frequent occurrence, some of the equipment unboxed as brand new had demons that showed themselves fairly quickly after installation. The ninth item that you want to find out about is the process the vendor uses to resolve equipment reliability issues. Ask who is involved and how long each step described takes. Your best case is the fewest people involved and a short time line. Keep in mind you need to find out how the vendor handles replacing a machine that is within 90 days of installation as well as equipment that has been in use longer. These 2 categories are usually handled differently.

10)What do you want to change?

Unless you are a start-up business, you probably are currently using a copier and have a current vendor. During your relationship there are issues that have likely surfaced. The tenth item you need to find out before choosing your copier vendor is can the vendor(s) you are considering serve you in a way that eliminates or minimizes the issues that you are currently experiencing. Pretending you have a magic wand, describe on paper the perfect equipment vendor. Have your wish list close at hand when discussing how you want to work with a potential (or current) vendor. Have the vendor put in writing your expectations and how they will deliver them. Remember item 2 above and make sure get an answer to the question “or what?” for each area of concern. Promises or guarantees without “teeth” will not deliver the support you are seeking.

Researching these ten questions will help you choose the best vendor for your business. If you have any questions, you can e-mail them to help@bottomlineadv.com.